

Draft Policy Framework – Not for Distribution

Education

At the session we will be looking for feedback on education issues that affect West Australians, whether as students, parents or members of the education workforce.

Save Our Services is a public sector lead organization that welcomes community members that share our aim of addressing the impact of privatization, out-sourcing, public asset sales, poor treatment of the public sector workforce and funding cuts to public services.

Given this, we aim to contribute to the defeat of the current conservative WA state government

Of course, SOS is not itself seeking election to form government and so we are not preparing a long and detailed policy document.

Of course we cannot assure in advance that all ideas and priorities will be included in a final document.

Specific outcomes sought from the forum include ideas and priorities in the policy area under discussion, such as:

- Ideas that may be included in policy documentation or our communication effort publicly or with SOS supporters;
- Individuals are encouraged to identify themselves as willing to contribute further after the forum either through policy and research expertise, providing personal stories related to the policy area, to be in photo's or as campaign volunteers.

CASE STUDY: Fixed Term Contracts

The most prevalent form of insecure work in the public sector is fixed-term contract. There are legitimate reasons why a worker may be engaged on a fixed-term contract, such as to cover a period of relief or to work on a project with a finite life. However, the number of workers presently engaged in fixed-term contracts across the public sector is high, which points to the widespread misuse of contract employment.

The amount of teachers and education support staff on fixed term contracts within the Department of Education is excessive. This is in part due to the excessive use of contract staff by Independent Public Schools. Job security makes a huge difference in the lives of education support staff, who are already subject to low wages. Reducing the numbers of permanent staff in public schools, and therefore negatively impacting continuity, has a negative impact on the quality of education received by West Australians.

CASE STUDY: WA public schools

In August 2013 the Western Australian State Government announced an overhaul of WA public school funding, citing the move as part of a broader plan to improve the efficiency of the system in preparation for the introduction of a new funding model. As part of the funding overhaul, \$180 million was cut from school budgets, staffing and central office resourcing. This included cuts to education assistants, Aboriginal and Islander education officers, central office support staff, school support program funding, allocations of teaching hours, professional development and a levy imposed on schools to reduce long service leave liabilities. Many schools, principals, teachers, education assistants and support staff have provided overwhelming feedback that the 'education cuts' have made it more difficult to provide every student with the educational support, flexibility, attention and resources required. In correspondence sent from school communities to State Members of Parliament in May 2014, the following commentary provides a snapshot of the impact of funding reductions:

"These cuts have resulted in increased class sizes, reductions in staff, significantly less money for student resources and a reduction for staff professional development." – Perth metropolitan high school.

"These changes have been very stressful on teaching staff. There is insufficient support for students at educational risk, inadequate resourcing, under staffing, loss of education assistants and a huge impact on overall student opportunities" – Perth metropolitan primary school.

"Reductions to our school budget and the loss of specialist staff members has made it increasingly challenging to ensure our students receive the individual attention they deserve." – Rural primary school.

Teaching staff are increasingly likely to spend their own money on classroom expenses due to the inadequacies of school budgets to cover these resources. In 2014 the SSTUWA ran survey of 1300 teachers which found that 98% had spent personal money on classroom expenses at an average of \$545 per semester.¹

*'We have not been allowed to buy new text books, smart boards and have to keep expenses at a minimum. This means we are often spending our own money on resources.'*¹

Class sizes have been acutely affected since the introduction of IPS and broader funding cuts to the system. In 2015 a survey of 2586 teachers found that 83.9 per cent experiences increased class sizes since 2013 with 43% close to or at maximum class size limit as per the General Agreement.¹ This is supported by Department of Education class size audits with regularly show around 5-8% of classes oversize¹ and annual Reports on Government Services which show WA teacher student ratios increasing.¹

“With less support staff or flexible money we have less specialist positions such as behaviour manager, literacy support etc and have less opportunity to reduce class sizes to fit class needs in a complex low socio economical school.”¹

When faced with questions of funding the State Government is quick to reply that appropriation for the public education sector has increased each year and that WA students are among the best funded in the nation. It is certainly the case that the size of the education budget has increased. However, this reflects three additional years of compulsory schooling as well as a large increase in student numbers requiring the building of new schools and appointment of additional staff. In addition the demographics of WA with its large size but rather small country towns – in comparison with Queensland, say – and overall small population means that the per capita expenditure in WA is much higher than states such as Victoria or NSW. Actual school budgets have been affected - most of them negatively.

CASE STUDY: TAFE fee increases

A significant factor in making sure WA people have the skills needed for emerging industries is by ensuring citizens have access to well-funded, high quality training services via public TAFE colleges. TAFE is a public system which everyone should have the right to access, regardless of their circumstances. TAFE colleges are the training industry leaders and ensure that students walk away with a high quality education that gives them the best opportunity for meaningful employment. Since 2014 the state government has dramatically increased student fees, including concessional rates and apprenticeships. Many students, especially those on a lower income, are now struggling to afford a TAFE education and are forced to turn to lower quality private training providers offering cheaper and shorter courses. There are an increasing number of cases where private training providers have cut corners and not met training standards, leaving students with qualifications that may not be recognised by future employers.

Examples of TAFE Fee Increases

Course	2013	2014	2015
Cert IV in Beauty Therapy	\$626	\$3908	\$4636
Diploma of Graphic Design	\$2545	\$4070	\$4173
Diploma of Fashion and Textile Design	\$1241	\$4369	\$4479
Cert IV in Business Administration	\$621	\$1685	\$2464
Diploma of Management	\$621	\$1907	\$2381
Certificate IV in Accounting	\$1037	\$2293	\$2836
Diploma of Business - Legal Studies	\$986	\$2156	\$2697
Diploma of Music	\$1241	\$4888	\$4888
Cert IV in Building and Construction	\$1241	\$2979	\$3534
Advanced Diploma of Engineering – Oil and Gas	\$2203	\$9096	\$9298
Certificate IV in Surveying	\$1156	\$2783	\$3162
Diploma of Surveying	\$1751	\$5640	\$5840
Cert IV in Education Support	\$621	\$1999	\$2743
Diploma of Nursing	\$1862	\$8295	\$8505
Certificate IV in Fitness	\$621	\$2508	\$3045
Cert III in Travel	\$621	\$3222	\$3822
Cert III in Events	\$621	\$2097	\$2487
Diploma of Events	\$1241	\$5032	\$5159
Advanced Diploma of Engineering - Electrical	\$2203	\$10728	\$11019

In 2014 the then Minister for Training made clear to Parliament the state government's policy of shifting the cost of a TAFE education to students, saying that, "*Of the \$45.8 million reduction (to TAFE funding), \$26 million will be replaced through additional student fee increases.*" The state government increased TAFE fees even further in 2015, even though enrolments dropped by over 5,200 students.

In the 2016/17 state budget, fees have again been increased by 4 per cent. For some courses, student fees have now increased by over 650 900 per cent. Many students can no longer access TAFE courses at these rates, forcing them to turn to private providers who may not offer the same quality in their training. Some students in low paid, female dominated industries such as social and community services are being asked over \$10,000 for a Diploma.

Many students can no longer access TAFE courses at these rates, forcing them to turn to private providers who may not offer the same quality in their training. At a time when unemployment in WA has risen to over six per cent and youth unemployment is over 10 per cent, making it harder to access further education and training is counter-productive to the future economic prosperity of the state.

The long term consequences of a reduced-capacity public training sector will lead to industry training shortages, fewer employment opportunities and the increased potential for students to be left with large debts via private training providers using the federal VET FEE HELP scheme. The later issue is important, not least for the individual, but for the nation as a whole which is estimated to increase its VET FEE HELP debt by billions over the next 5 years; this would be unsustainable.

SOS Campaign Vision and objectives

Our vision for WA

- *A state in which the community shares and manages the risks of economic life for the good of all Western Australians*
- *A state in which the public sector restores balance to the economy to lift WA's employment, income and wealth*
- *A state in which working people in the public sector have the skills, training and employment conditions they need to be flexible, adaptive and innovative in serving the WA community*
- *A state in which the public delivery of services builds a fair and cohesive society for the common good of all Western Australians*

The people of WA will accomplish this because

- *A dynamic and capable public sector will meet the high expectations of Western Australians for a stable and growing economy which sustains their families*
- *The provision of public or human services will improve employment opportunities in WA by meeting the needs of all Western Australians for health, education and social services*
- *The public sector will make long term commitments to service delivery instead of short-term contracts to buy services from big business – which cause shortfalls in service delivery and increased costs*
- *The public sector will build productive partnerships with not-for-profit organisations, instead of forcing NFPs into wasteful and unproductive tendering processes for service delivery*
- *The public sector will also respect, protect and strengthen the advocacy role of the NFP sector through the restoration of independent funding arrangements*
- *The public sector will be both responsible and accountable for taking action to overcome poverty and disadvantage in WA*
- *The public sector will attract and retain skilled staff for service delivery through secure employment arrangements, safe and healthy workplaces, and by respecting the need for employees to speak up together for fair wages and conditions*
- *The public sector will therefore ensure reasonable opportunities for employees to access their unions during inductions, and meet union representatives to discuss issues of importance to them and their workplaces*